

SB 261 – Creating the Montana Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act

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I rise in support of SB 261, but would offer a few modifications to make the Legislation stronger.

I testified on the bill in Senate Hearings, but have other commitments as this hearing takes place.

First of all, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that the Sage Grouse Issue is about more than Sage Grouse – **"The Larger Issue is an attempt by some to remove Livestock Grazing on Public Lands by advocating for the Sage Grouse to be put on the Endangered Species List."**

I have been involved with the same issue in Canada, the special interests are using the same tactics in that country as they are here.

The Western States are to be commended for working with the Fed Gov towards a conversation program that will hopefully keep the Sage Grouse off the Endangered Species List.

SB 261 supports the efforts of the Western States, however some assumptions in the bill should be modified so as to improve the legislation.

Some proponents of the bill, make it sound as tho the major problem that has contributed to the reduced Sage Grouse Populations, is the loss of Habitat. They will profess that their statement is based on Science.

I have not a problem with Science, but I have a problem with Scientists who have a bias when citing their Scientific findings.

One has to realize that if these folks can make the case for loss of Habitat, they will push for a reduction or outright ban on Livestock Grazing on Public Lands, make no mistake.

My testimony is based on experience as I have lived in Sage Grouse Country.

From my perspective, Habitat is not the problem but Predators are.

Some Predator populations have increased dramatically over the last 20 years. The Red Fox, the Silver Fox and Raccoons were not to be found in this part of the country three decades ago, then add the Coyote, the Skunk, the Wolf (in some areas), the Ravens (populations have increased dramatically) and to a lesser note the Magpie, there in lies the culprit.

All of these species work the ground and sniff out the nests and birds.

Mosquitoes can be another problem as a certain species of Mosquito can carry the Encephalitis (Sleeping Sickness) bug that they transmit to the Sage Grouse.

I'm not a vet, however what I have observed, is that some years are worse than others. I also wonder if the Sage Grouse can build an immunity to the disease.

The Eagles and Hawks aren't as big a problem because unlike the other predators, they spot their prey from the air.

I would like to draw attention to several statements in the bill that are worthy of comment;

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Line 15 (g) I assert that Livestock Grazing reduces the fuel, yet doesn't harm the Sage Grouse Habitat, Sage Brush.

Line 16 (h) I have never seen a dead Sage Grouse by a fence. This would amount to an enormous expense of having to mark all fences.

Line 17 (i) the four legged Predators don't set on platforms and the Ravens primarily work the ground.

Line 18 (j) it won't be effective, the only solution is to drastically reduce the Predator Populations.

I would propose;

That in Montana we use some of the \$10 million that is proposed in this bill and put a bounty on the Predators, let the Ranchers and /or Hunters help to reduce the Predator Populations and get paid for doing so.

We used to have Government Trappers (40's and 50's) who kept certain Predators under control.

In the late 40's and early 50's the Stock Growers initiated a bounty on Magpies that were causing problems with Cattle.

They would peck at a brand or wound or grubs when they exited the backs of Cattle in the spring, once opened that's where they had their daily meals. If the Cattlemen didn't monitor their Cattle closely the wounds would become infected and would have to be treated.

The bounty consisted of \$0.05 per pair of legs or an egg. Boy the farm kids went to work hunting Magpies and or their nests. These youngsters, proved that we are descendant's of the Monkey, cause they could scale a tree in seconds.

The bounty worked then and is worthy of consideration in this case.

Predators are the problem and need to be addressed.

After 10 years of Predator depopulation, compare Sage Grouse Population #'s, it will be surprising.

Bottomline, let this legislation more appropriately address the major issue regarding the decrease in Sage Grouse populations.

Respectfully Submitted

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